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SOCIAL ACTION

**OUR PARTICIPATION AS
CHRISTIANS IN POLITICS**

By Francis P. Miller

25¢

The purpose of SOCIAL ACTION is to assist its readers in their efforts to understand, in the light of the Christian faith, issues that continually arise in social and political life, and to find effective ways of action with respect to them. It claims no authority except as it is able to appeal convincingly to the Christian conscience. Responsibility for its contents is assumed by the Editorial Board, the Editor, and the individual writers.

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Prefatory Note

Col. Francis Pickens Miller, who presents the topic selected for attention in this issue, is peculiarly qualified to discuss participation by Christians in politics. *Social Action* is sometimes criticized for being theoretical and rather remote from reality. This month we are to be led through the byways of practical politics by a man who has learned his political lessons the hard way. As a member of the Virginia State Legislature, and as a candidate for Governor of the State in 1949 and for the U.S. Senate in 1952, he accumulated a large store of political knowledge—as he had acquired knowledge of military affairs by participation in the two world wars.

Moreover, Col. Miller speaks as a churchman and a Christian leader. He is Moderator of the Synod of Virginia of the Presbyterian Church, U.S., and represents his denomination on the Executive Committee of the World Council of Churches. For ten years he was chairman of the World's Student Christian Federation. He brings to the discussion of his subject unusual equipment in mind and spirit.

—F. E. J.

Our Participation as Christians in Politics

The future of Western civilization depends in no small part upon the relation of American Christians to American politics, and upon what American Christians do about American politics. Yet there are few areas of Christian thought more nebulous than the relation of politics to religion. We know that if religion is used merely as an emotional reinforcement of power politics it ceases to be valid or vital. On the other hand, we also know that politics divorced from religion may lead to totalitarian tyranny. It is, therefore, a matter of extreme urgency that American Christians give serious consideration to the relation of Christian faith to "politics" and feel a moral imperative to political action.

One of the greatest difficulties in the way of our understanding is the current use of the words "politics" and "politician." These words are commonly used by Americans in a derisive or derogatory sense. "He is just a politician" means that the person designated is a pretty poor sort of fellow. On the other hand, to say, "Well, I guess it's just politics," is a fairly prevalent way of describing and condoning reprehensible conduct. The fact that these words are so used is a serious matter. If the persons and activities they describe continue to be thought of by most Americans in this way, the future of the Republic is not bright. No republic will long survive if those charged with its maintenance are regarded by their fellow citizens with contempt, or if the activities required for its maintenance are considered unworthy of the ablest and best citizens.

What Is Politics?

Politics is the business of providing, maintaining, and changing government. The creation of government is an expression of the God-implanted craving in man for orderly relationships,

justice, fair play, and peace. Consequently, politics ought to be among the most honorable of all human activities. Hobbes' famous description of human life before the emergence of organized society as "nasty, brutish, and short" is certainly an understatement. The law and order established by government is a condition of civilized living, and the debt of each individual to government is incalculable.

Because the game of politics as played in America is still in its formative period the rules are not too well defined, and at times the game itself is pretty rough. But the reputation of government is inseparable from the reputation of the political activity that brings it into being and sustains it.

In recent years a favorite device of some politicians has been to discredit government itself when the current administration did not act in conformity with their wishes. Destroying the confidence of people in government as such is fraught with the possibility of grave consequences. That is one of the reasons why it is so important to convert politics into a profession which attracts able, high-minded and incorruptible citizens. If citizens have confidence in their political leaders they will have confidence in their government.

Why Is a Christian Concerned with Politics?

One purpose of this article is to call attention to those specific elements in the Christian faith which make it mandatory for Christians to participate in the task of organizing, maintaining, and at times changing the structure and functions of government; that is, to participate in politics. The Christian faith requires Christians to be good citizens. A Christian does not work for good government because of some vague idealism or humanitarianism. He works for good government because of what he believes about the nature of the world in which he lives and the meaning of his own life in the world.

There is room here for considerable difference of opinion. However, it is incumbent upon every Christian to realize the

nature and force of the mandate for social and political action that his faith lays upon him. Our responsibilities as citizens are reinforced by our religious convictions. We believe that the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ is the Maker of the world in which we live, and that nothing good is being made which He is not making. In other words, we believe that the work of creation continues and that God creates through men, as well as through the natural order.

The God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ is at one and the same time Creator, Judge, and Redeemer. He destroys evil, and He makes good. As He creates and redeems, He changes the nature of men—old things are put away, all things are become new. And as each man is changed, his relations with other men with whom he comes in contact are changed—with members of his family, with neighbors, with fellow workers in the factory, with business associates, and with members of his political party. These changes occur because, in the deepest sense, the love of God influences men's attitudes toward each other. Fellowship replaces exploitive relationships and lays the foundation of a genuine Christian community.

As God changes men in their relationships with each other, He changes human society and government. Further, God has purposes for human society which can be realized only through men whom His love has changed. These purposes, Christians believe, include achievement of responsible freedom, participation in self-government, provision of equality of opportunity, and establishment of justice and peace. These purposes, however, cannot be realized apart from political activity. Consequently, a Christian conscious of the full implications of his faith will feel impelled to participate in politics.

It is easier for some of us to relate our faith to our responsibility for public affairs if we think in terms of the Kingdom of God. Each Christian is by faith a citizen here and now of that city which hath foundations, whose Builder and Maker is

God. This citizenship does not begin at death: it is present; it concerns me where I am and in what I am doing at this moment.

My citizenship in the Kingdom of God should be the decisive fact in my life. It defines my ultimate loyalty. It should determine what kind of Virginian I am and what kind of American I am. The problem then becomes: How can we express through our American citizenship the meaning of our citizenship in His Kingdom? Because of our citizenship in His Kingdom, what do we say as citizens of our nation and of our respective states and communities that is any different from what we would otherwise have said, or what do we do in this secular sphere that is any different from what we would otherwise have done? If we translate the values of the Kingdom into practical political terms, what are the goals in American political life for which we should strive?

To answer such questions responsibly means, among other things, going into politics. It means going into politics aware that our supreme loyalty is to God as we know Him in Jesus Christ. That loyalty provides a touchstone for every political decision and act. A citizen who has that loyalty lives in a state of moral tension between the demands of God's will and the realities of human life. An honest attempt to resolve this tension inevitably changes things. Further, a citizen who is aware of this tension between the will of God and the actualities of his own life will, on the one hand, be conscious of the relativity and imperfection of his noblest efforts, and on the other hand will be inspired by the knowledge that with God all things are possible.

In the field of practical politics a man with Christian faith will evidence it in his attitude toward other human beings—how he feels about their worth and their destiny; how he makes his appeal to them and how he thinks of using them for political purposes; what he conceives to be their responsibility to government and what he conceives to be government's responsibility to them.

Erroneous Views of the Relation of Religion to Politics

Current thinking of most American Christians about their relation to politics is very different from the line of thought developed above. For most Christians, the world of religion and the world of politics are separate, and there is little intercourse between them. One of the main reasons why American Christians think of politics and religion as belonging to separate spheres is a misunderstanding of what is meant by the separation of church and state in our American Constitution. This separation is guaranteed by the first clause of the First Amendment to the Constitution, which reads, "Congress shall make no law respecting an establishment of religion, or prohibiting the free exercise thereof." The Supreme Court now interprets this Amendment as applicable to the states as well. Its effect is to insure complete separation between the administration of government and the administration of religious bodies. This is one of the most important provisions in the Constitution and is a cornerstone of our republican form of government. Neither the federal nor the state governments can establish a state church nor can they interfere with religious liberty, as long as it is exercised within the requirements of other constitutional provisions. That is the essence of separation between state and church in America.

Nothing in the Constitution prohibits the church from passing moral judgment upon political conduct, or prohibits Christian people from applying their Christian principles to political activity. Yet many Christians seem to believe that the constitutional separation of church and state implies that they need not as *Christians* be concerned with politics. An elder in my own church once said to me, "Francis, you know the church hasn't anything to do with politics." He was right if he meant that the church should never enter the political arena with candidates of its own and platforms of its own, as though it were a political party. But he was wholly wrong if he meant that the

church is not concerned with what kind of men become candidates, with the way political campaigns are conducted, with how office-holders conduct themselves in office, and with the policies of government at all levels.

Moreover, many good and responsible people tend to think of practical politics as a necessary evil in which genuine Christians would not wish to participate actively. Since, in their view, politics and religion are two separate spheres, there is no reason why Christians should feel any compulsion to press for the application of Christian ethics to political activity. Not only is there no compulsion to a positive application of standards, but all too frequently there is complete apathy on the part of Christians in the presence of evil in political form. Outrageous conduct which would not be tolerated in any other sphere of human activity is often condoned by the expression, "That's just politics." In other words, anything is supposed to "go" in politics.

This partially explains why in recent years the Christian conscience has been so shamefully unconcerned with some of the methods used in American political campaigns. In a run-off primary for the United States Senate in 1950, Frank Graham was defeated by a smear campaign almost unparalleled in the recent history of the South. If the conscience of the Christian people of his state had functioned as one would expect the conscience of a Christian community to function, the persons responsible for this campaign would have been driven from public life, never to return. The success of these methods in North Carolina was particularly surprising since that state has always had an enviable record of tolerance and fair play. Unfortunately, similar methods have been used in many other states, and those who use them often win. This is a terrible indictment of the Christian conscience as well as of contemporary American politics.

One of the most curious aspects of the current attitude of Christian people toward politics is that so many Christians think it is unchristian to criticize a political opponent or attack those

responsible for evil practices in politics. A sweet young girl said to a friend of mine during the course of a recent political campaign in Virginia, "A Christian shouldn't say anything unless he can say something nice." This attitude among Christians strengthens the forces of materialism and corruption. If Christians will only misunderstand their gospel completely enough to refrain from exposing evil in the political arena, then the men who want to subordinate the general welfare to private gain have little to fear. It would suit them well if the church would teach that the judgment of God is reserved for Judgment Day. This would give them plenty of time to accomplish their purposes.

The judgment of God will, to be sure, be given on Judgment Day, but, according to the Bible, the judgment of God is also given every day of our lives. The Old Testament prophets pronounced the judgment of God, and the twenty-third chapter of Matthew is one of the most scathing denunciations of men in high places that can be found in the pages of literature. The very love of God compels us to point out injustice, falsehood, hypocrisy, or chicanery wherever we find it, and this is one of the reasons why Christians should be concerned with politics.

American public life is suffering grievously from the effect

The temptation of the good man is either to moralize politics so much that he allows himself to become a party with one member only, and this party is all the more convinced of its essential righteousness because it is defeated on every issue. Or he despairs of ever moralizing politics at all and so withdraws into the realm of personal religion and private virtue, counting it to himself as righteousness that he is thus unspotted by the world. He does not see that when evil men come to power in a society from which good men have withdrawn, the latter must bear some of the guilt.

—From "How Are We Justified by Faith?" by Edgar Leonard Allen,
The Christian Century, October 21, 1953

of the Christian community's failure to recognize the proper responsibility of Christians for political activity. The tree of liberty grew in a soil enriched by Christian culture. If there are signs of blight on the tree, we have only ourselves to blame. There has been a great deal of talk recently about corruption in government. In so far as corruption has existed, the Christian people of America are primarily responsible for it. We are culpable because in too many instances we have let the political battle go by default. Moreover, because of our failure to understand the implications of our faith, many of us Christians have become dupes of the most materialistic forces in America. If we are to save our civilization, Christians must act in the political arena. What does such action involve?

Christians and the American Party System

I hold that if a Christian is to act effectively in the political arena, he must become acquainted with the machinery of party politics and must find ways of participating in the activities of a political party. I am aware that this assumption is contrary to a view widely held among well-educated and sincere Christians. Many such believe that a Christian should hold himself aloof from the party struggle and act as an independent, voting for the "best man" rather than for a party ticket. Situations may arise where a Christian citizen is forced to be an independent, but, in general, the argument for aloofness, though it sounds plausible, is actually an expression of irresponsibility.

Genuine political responsibility can be exercised only through a party organization. Further, the Christian citizen who commits himself to the "best man" thesis (I vote for the man and not the party) may find that he has overlooked the important and decisive question which should determine how his ballot ought to be cast; namely, what are the social forces which control a particular candidate and which that candidate will represent if he is elected? Locating these forces is often a difficult task because they are all too frequently hidden, but the

social forces a public official represents are just as important as his personal character and sometimes may be far more important, politically, than his character.

What is the American party system and how does it operate? A quarter of a century ago, when I was living in Europe, I felt that it was a weakness of American politics that our two major parties were not committed to ideological positions. In the intervening years I have learned that what I once regarded as a weakness is actually the greatest strength of our two-party system. With us, the great political parties are mechanisms by which government is alternately provided for the American people. When one party is in, the other is out, hoping to get in. Each party represents a rough cross section of American life. Each party has a rich historic heritage and a record of service to the nation. The party which is out offers an ever-present alternative to the party in power. Actually, the two parties closely resemble two baseball clubs, and political life in America offers many analogies to the national game.

Millions of Americans are Democrats or Republicans for countless different reasons, such as accidents of birth, residence, occupation, and membership in minority groups. Sometimes, happily, party affiliation is dictated by deep conviction. But such conviction is not, in general, ideological; it does not signify, save exceptionally, adherence to any particular philosophy of government. One of the most disastrous things that could happen to our Republic would be for the Democratic Party to become a labor party and the Republican Party to become a "big business" party. If that ever happened, class warfare would be unavoidable. For the present, our safety lies in the fact that the organization of each party is very flexible and includes all elements of our national population. When the Democratic Party becomes reactionary, as it has done on a number of occasions, forward-looking young men and women can make the Republican Party the party of progress. Contrariwise, the Democratic Party can act as the party of progress when the Republicans go reactionary.

Of course, it isn't quite so simple as that. The parties are by no means duplicates of each other. Democrats pride themselves on their appeal to lower income groups, to free traders, and to those who are aware of our international responsibilities. The Republicans on the other hand are more inclined to appeal to upper income groups, big business, and "sound-money" men. However, there are many Democrats who think like Republicans and some Republicans who think like Democrats. A certain amount of variety in each political party is an essential factor in our national strength. The result is that many differences of opinion and many social tensions are resolved within each party before they appear on the national stage. If our deepest differences were fought out exclusively on the national stage rather than within each party, we would not have nearly as much national unity as we have today.

It is essential that our parties be maintained, in principle, as they are. We must never allow them to become inflexible, ideological movements.

As a Christian citizen begins to take an interest in politics, he will wish to become familiar with party machinery from precinct to national level. He should make the acquaintance of precinct workers and learn from them about the organization of his party in the neighborhood in which he lives. Beginning with that, he will soon discover how to become acquainted with the party on higher levels. In the course of his inquiries, he will also become familiar with the party mechanism for nominating candidates. In some instances this is done by primaries and in others by conventions.

The National Convention

The national party convention is one of the most fascinating political phenomena of our time. There is nothing comparable to it in any other country. It is a unique American contribution to the political process. Because a convention so often resembles a prize fight or circus, many thoughtful people feel that it would

be wiser to nominate presidential tickets through a primary. I disagree. When the worst has been said about conventions and their procedures, I am convinced that over the years the ablest men available have, as a general rule, been nominated at these conventions. I am equally convinced that national primaries could not be trusted over the years to equal the convention's record of selection.

Take the cases of Wendell Willkie and Adlai Stevenson. Because of the power of local Republican leaders I think it is highly unlikely that Willkie could have won the nomination in a Republican primary. Furthermore, obviously Stevenson could never have been induced to offer himself in a presidential primary, and if a primary had been held by the Democrats in 1952 some much less able man would probably have won the Democratic nomination.

The hitherto unformed will of the mass of the people sometimes takes shape and becomes articulate with surprising clarity in national nominating conventions. Party organizers and bosses are, of course, eager to find the man who will attract the largest number of voters. And in their search for this man they not infrequently discover and draft someone who would be most reluctant to subject himself to the ordeal and expense of a nation-wide primary campaign. Good men instinctively shrink from such harrowing experiences. Further, idealistic forces in the country are more apt to become vocal in a national convention than in a national primary. Woodrow Wilson's nomination at the Baltimore Democratic convention of 1912 is an illustration of how those forces can tip the scales in such a gathering.

The Campaign

Many Christians look askance at political campaigns as pretty dubious affairs. One thing is certain: no one ought to offer himself as a candidate in an important political campaign in America unless he has a thick skin and a sense of humor, and unless he likes folks.

I have known able and earnest Christians who felt that they ought to offer for public office, but who felt that, as Christians, they could not campaign. They conceived it to be their sole duty to let it be known that they were available on the assumption that if the citizens wished to use their services they would vote accordingly. This is a false assumption. When one offers himself for public office, he owes it to his friends, who will be working for him in any event, to campaign as hard as he can. Further, he owes it to the citizens at large to conduct a vigorous campaign, for, otherwise, they will not become familiar either with him or with his platform.

The purpose of the campaign is, of course, to convince the majority of the voters that a particular candidate is best qualified for the office sought. Let us hope the day will come when a political campaign will be primarily an appeal to men's intelligence and social conscience. However, given the current political climate in America, appeals to prejudice and passion are more apt to win campaigns than appeals to either intelligence or conscience. This poses terribly difficult problems for Christian citizens. Some of these problems will be discussed later.

One of the most unfortunate aspects of the present political situation is that in the absence of a discussion of ideas, tactics assumes undue importance. I have been at several important national political conferences recently where methods of winning campaigns were discussed. Apparently most people felt that if you had the right gimmick, you could win. This may be true, but if it is it is very depressing. Obviously a Christian should be able to contribute something more than a gimmick to politics.

Another profoundly disturbing feature of current political campaigns in the United States is their cost. In many parts of the country a person of modest means or even the average well-to-do citizen cannot afford to enter politics. The *New York Times* reported on October 11, 1953, that twenty-three million dollars were spent in efforts to swing House, Senate, and Presidential elections in 1952. This amount was reported in accordance with the law, but many millions additional were no doubt

A SENATE COMMITTEE'S PROPOSAL

The basic problem, which puts candidates for election in an almost impossible situation, is the lack of general public support, both personal and financial. The fact that campaign contributions are not deductible for income-tax purposes puts democratic politics at a disadvantage compared with the community chest, the Red Cross, and a multitude of other organized charities. Is this discrimination against democratic participation in government justifiable? The subcommittee thinks not. Tax deduction of a reasonable contribution, perhaps up to \$100 for each taxpayer, should be authorized by law, where the contribution goes to a candidate or campaign committee that reports contributions and expenditures in full. In a sense, by not permitting tax deductions, the Government (and the public) is discriminating against its own vital processes. If the denial of deductibility is based on the theory that all politics is "selfish," it has the anomalous distinction of tending to make its major premise true by driving candidates into the arms of the most avidly selfish interests.

Persuasive testimony has been received arguing that direct public support for political campaigns is desirable. There are, admittedly, difficulties to be worked out in putting such a policy into effect, but they are not insurmountable. Public support might be provided in a number of ways. . . .

The subcommittee believes that some form of public support is justified. It would be less expensive than the indirect costs of allowing candidates and parties to be solely dependent upon the support of well-heeled special interests. An infinitesimal fraction of the Government's biennial expenditures would provide ample support. The subcommittee endorses the principle of public support and commends it to the consideration of the Senate Committee on Rules and Administration and the House Committee on House Administration.

—From the Report of Senator Douglas' Committee, on
"Ethical Standards in Government," 1951

spent by persons and in ways not covered by federal statutes. The total amount spent on state and local elections will never be known, but it would not surprise me to learn that during some years the American people spent more than one hundred million dollars on political campaigns at all levels. I have known of state Democratic primaries in the South where well over half a million dollars was spent in support of one candidate. A lot of this money comes from financially interested sources in the North, which are sometimes controlled by avowed Christians. One of the ironies of our time is that some northern industrialists who are Christians seem determined to prevent Christians interested in the welfare of human beings from winning political contests in the South. The cost of campaigns has soared to such a point that except in rare instances only wealthy citizens or those who are willing to be supported by corporate wealth can afford to undertake them.

The time is overdue for legislation, comparable to British legislation, which would drastically limit the amount of money to be spent and require the sources to be revealed. As far as federal elections are concerned, \$50,000 for a Senate campaign and \$20,000 for a House of Representatives campaign would seem to me to be fair limits. Laws covering these elections should prohibit the expenditure of additional funds by any person for any purpose whatsoever related to the campaign, with heavy penalties imposed for violation. Federal laws should also require radio and TV companies to allocate to each candidate an equal amount of free time as a public service, since the use of these facilities is one of the major items in a campaign budget. Comparable laws should be enacted in each of the states. In some states at the present time the sky is the limit, and only millionaires or candidates financed by management or labor can afford to run for state-wide office.

The Christian Citizen's Opportunity

The first duty of a Christian citizen is to become as well informed as possible regarding public affairs. In some states he

will find it very difficult to do this. Traditionally, the press in America has been relied upon to supply accurate information and intelligent editorial comment. Unfortunately, in many parts of the country the press is ceasing to perform this function. In Virginia, for example, there is no daily in a city of more than 15,000 whose editorial page is genuinely interested in the future of the national Democratic Party. That may be thought a good thing for the Republican Party, but it is a very poor thing for our two-party system. However, it would cost five or six million dollars to start an independent daily in Richmond. Such funds do not exist, and, for the time being, there is no solution to the problem. I cannot believe, however, that this situation will permanently endure. In view of the absence of a two-party press, the citizen will have to rely more and more on radio and television. And at present the cost of these media, if time has to be bought at commercial rates to present the other side of the story, is prohibitive.

The Christian citizen will not only become as well informed as he can regarding public affairs; he will also cultivate the habit of thinking about political matters and political issues and discussing them with his friends and neighbors. He will tirelessly seek to discover God's purposes in the political and social forces of his day. He will always be asking himself such questions as these: What is destroying fellowship and genuine community in my city, county, or state? What is obstructing justice and truth? What are the political objectives that will better serve the ends of fellowship, community, justice, truth, and responsible freedom?

In addition to informing himself and participating in political discussion, the Christian citizen will feel it to be his duty to vote and vote intelligently. In some instances, no doubt, he may feel it to be his duty to refrain from voting, as the only means available to him to express his protest against the total political situation which has developed. However, such protest abstentions should be the rare exception and not the general rule.

The Christian citizen should not only vote intelligently, but he should participate in party activities, beginning with the precinct party organization in the community where he lives. Joining the local political organization of his party does not mean for a moment that he subscribes to everything the organization stands for or identifies himself with all of its activities. As a Christian, it is his responsibility to fight within the organization for better party goals. He must fight for better and cleaner political organization and procedures within the party. One of the most valuable contributions he can make is to provide a current critique of "ends" and "means." He knows that the ends do not "justify the means," and he will have to be working constantly at this problem.

The time may come when he will have a clear call to run for political office. He should welcome this opportunity and offer himself.

Tests for Christian Candidates

The acid test of a Christian's active participation in politics is his conduct as a candidate for public office. First of all, he has to choose his personal platform, within the limits set by the party organization. That is, he has to choose the aims and goals for which he promises to work if elected. Since a Christian believes that God wants to make the world better, he will not, as a citizen, continue indefinitely to associate himself with a party that has made the defense of the status quo its primary concern. If his party has adopted such a policy he must for the time being take an independent stand. At the same time, however, the Christian citizen will always do everything in his power to help conserve the best in the social heritage of his country or community. The aims and objectives which he chooses should be inspired by his Christian faith that God intended something much finer for the human race than we have yet begun to realize.

The Christian candidate will be fully conscious of the limitations of the power of government and sensitive to the dangers of totalitarian government in whatever form they may present

themselves. But he will also be aware that in certain areas government is the only agency which represents all the people and which can guarantee the minimum economic conditions without which there can be no freedom. The maintenance of a proper balance between freedom and security is the essence of liberty as understood by the Christian conscience. The task of the Christian statesman is to ascertain the point of optimum return from government action—the point at which the curves of responsible freedom and initiative cease rising and begin to decline if further security is guaranteed by government. In a dynamic society, no fixed point can be established. But the main concern of the Christian statesman will be to define the point as successive policy decisions have to be made.

Next to his choice of aims, the most important choice which the Christian candidate has to make is that of his lieutenants. I have known of Christian candidates so naive that in choosing their lieutenants they became beholden to the most sinister and vicious elements in their community. The bootlegger has often found it very advantageous to support the prohibitionist.

In addition to choosing his lieutenants, the candidate may have to create an organization. This is extremely important. We have to face the fact that campaigns are commonly won by good organization and not by speeches. It is, therefore, imperative that the campaign organization of a Christian candidate reflect the goals that he hopes to achieve.

An essential part of organization is finance. The Christian candidate will ordinarily find himself seriously handicapped in the effort to secure adequate funds for an effective campaign. Further, he will have to consider carefully obligations incurred by accepting money. The question is, where does the money come from and what return is expected if it is given? Most men who have run for a state office have had a relatively unknown person come to them and say, "I will make you Governor if you will accept so much assistance." Except in very rare instances, the answer of a Christian candidate is "No."

Many good people think of politics as a series of "deals." I believe the word "deal" is commonly used to describe an arrangement made in a "smoke-filled room" by which so many votes are delivered for such and such favors. There seems to be the impression that such deals are very common. They may be. I was never invited to sit in on such a conspiracy. Perhaps this isn't so much a tribute to my virtue as to my inability to pay for the cigars and drinks!

The question of compromise constantly arises in people's minds when they think of politics. It is generally assumed that if a Christian runs for office he has to compromise his Christian principles. He does not. It may be that compromise of principles is sometimes a condition of winning, but the Christian candidate doesn't consider winning his supreme goal. He wants to win, but not to win at any price.

In one sense, of course, life itself is compromise. It is impossible to live in any community and pay one's taxes without compromising to some extent. We need a Christian doctrine of compromise. In my opinion, a Christian will never compromise his own essential integrity or the ultimate goals toward which he is working. However, he will choose his next steps in the light of the prevailing public opinion both in his community and in his party, as well as in the light of his ultimate goals. Compromise in this sense is morally justified.

Moreover, in choosing his next steps the Christian candidate will wish to announce objectives that are beyond what the prevailing public opinion of the community is now prepared to accept, but not so far beyond that his objectives will be regarded as utopian. Some Christians have the mistaken belief that a candidate who fails to advocate the immediate realization of all of his ultimate goals is guilty of compromise in an evil sense. To advocate immediate realization of ultimate goals is not only to invite certain defeat but to bring ridicule upon Christian participation in political activity.

The Christian candidate will concern himself with right

timing. He will advocate the programs which he thinks will have a reasonable chance of commanding support in the not distant future. He will fight for these measures. He may be able to carry them out or he may not, but, in any event, he will seek to educate the people as to needed reforms and as to policies that should be avoided, rather than alienate them by a radical insistence on absolutes. A proper sense of timing is of the essence of statesmanship. Compromise in this sense is a Christian virtue.

The most difficult moment for a candidate in a campaign is when he is smeared. His reaction to smears provides a severe test of his character. Christians differ among themselves as to what the reaction of a candidate should be. No man in public life has ever been more grossly smeared than Frank Graham when he was running for the United States Senate, and no man deserved the smears less. He refrained from any comment on what was being done. In my opinion, his defeat was due in part to his silence. I believe he owed it to the people of North Carolina and to the Christian people throughout the nation to tell them what was being done and to tell them who the people were who were doing it. However, a strong case can be made for accepting political crucifixion, as Frank Graham accepted it. He may be a better judge of what was right than I.

What chance has a Christian of winning in an important political contest? I would say that, at the present time, where moral crusading is called for the chances of a Christian's losing are, on the whole, greater than of his winning, but that is not the most important thing. The question, Can he win? is not the right question. The right question is, How can he help to provide better government? Not infrequently, the cause of better government can be furthered by fighting and losing. I have known instances where state machines that had become completely insensitive to the interests of their people were forced to buy a new lease on life and power by adopting the reform programs of a determined and courageous minority which had conducted an all-out fight on behalf of those programs. One of

the most precious sayings that have come down to us from our Lord is this: "Except a grain of wheat fall into the ground and die, it abideth by itself alone: but if it die, it bringeth forth much fruit." Unamuno, in his "Tragic Sense of Life," quotes Gounod as saying, "Posterity is an accumulation of minorities." It is often the role of a Christian community to serve as a minority that is making posterity.

The Church and the Christian Candidate

Church people, including church leaders, have given little or no consideration to the relation between the Christian candidate and his church. In the absence of any definite Christian opinion on this subject, on the one hand the church may be misused, and on the other hand the Christian running for public office may find himself without the moral and spiritual support which he deserves.

A Christian who announces his candidacy for political office assumes a heavy responsibility toward the Christian community of which he is a part. In the first place, as a Christian, he must make absolutely sure that he never *uses* his church for political purposes. Under the pressure of a hot campaign, the temptation is enormous to take advantage of one's church connections. A candidate naturally hopes that his friends in the church will work for him, but he will betray his trust as a Christian if he ever tries to enlist the support of the church as an organization in the same way that he would enlist the support of a farm group or of a labor group.

Further, a Christian candidate has no right to expect support from his church as such, either from his local congregation or from the church at large. Nor does the Christian candidate have any right to expect the support of his own minister in the latter's official capacity. It will be very fine if privately, as a citizen, the minister feels like voting for him, but, if he does, it must be clearly understood that his support is given as a private citizen and not in his role as minister. Similarly, the Christian candidate

has no right to expect the support of any official groups or organizations within the church.

On the other hand, the Christian candidate has every right to expect from the church, as such, a special interest in every moral problem that may arise during the course of the campaign. He also has a right to expect that ministers in their sermons will attempt to clarify the ethical implications of the more important issues of the campaign.

Further, as a member of the Christian fellowship the Christian candidate has a right to expect from his fellow Christians a type of relationship which he cannot have with any other individuals or groups. If his fellow Christians take their responsibility seriously, the candidate may properly expect from them brotherly criticism of his mistakes, but he also has a right to expect a positive expression of the meaning of Christian brotherhood. Few people realize how lonely a Christian who is challenging powerful vested political interests sometimes feels. In the midst of such a fight, the Christian candidate's greatest needs are for genuine fellowship and spiritual reinforcement. Often the only place he can get this is in the fellowship of his own church. His Christian brothers, regardless of their political affiliations, should feel a very definite responsibility for standing by him as Christians when he is subjected to fraudulent smears or is attacked by the use of the "big lie." If the candidate is a genuine Christian, if his character is above reproach, and if he is engaged in the fight because he wants to see Christian standards applied to public affairs, then his fellow Christians, regardless of whether they vote for him or not, cannot avoid their obligation to vindicate his character and defend him from the false witnesses that have risen up against him.

During the course of my campaign for Governor of Virginia in 1949, the word began to be passed around in one section of the state that I was a Communist. The dean of a great theological seminary who had known me for forty years, wrote a letter to *The Washington Post* and another to the *Richmond Times-*

Dispatch saying that this was a lie and that anyone who said that about me was a liar. The letters were so devastating and their author so honored and respected throughout the state that this particular smear was never used again. Those who have not been subjected to attacks of this kind cannot appreciate what it meant to have a great Christian stand by me in such a moment of loneliness. The spiritual consolation and moral reinforcement which these letters brought will go with me as long as I live.

By and large, however, the occasions have been few and far between in American politics when Christian leaders gave a Christian who was running for public office that kind of support. As a matter of fact, taking the church as a whole, the record is a shocking revelation of callous insensitivity as far as the Christian conscience is concerned. All too frequently the Christian community permits its sons to go out and do battle for the right without giving them any moral or spiritual backing. Christian folk admire the heroism of a Sir Galahad, but as Christians they remain so aloof from the battle that the crusader for justice is often crucified without even hearing the word "well done" from his Christian brothers. In fact, in some parts of the country, the crusader for justice finds that when he goes on to the field of battle, the majorities that defeat him are largely composed of church members.

The Christian Citizen and His Church

Just as we need to give a great deal of thought to the relationship between a Christian candidate and his church, so we need to give more thought to the relationship between every Christian citizen in his political capacity, and his church. Here again the Christian citizen has no right to expect to be told by his church what party to join or what candidate to support. However, he does have a right to expect to hear from the pulpit a pronouncement of the judgment of God on evils in public life—not just on evils in Washington, but on political evils around the corner in his own home state and in both parties.

Further, the Christian citizen has a right to expect instruction in the practical application of Christian ethics to the current political scene. Such instruction may be given in men's clubs, women's groups, or specially organized forums, or in occasional Sunday School lessons. This instruction should be planned by the local congregation as a part of its program of Christian education. Its purpose should be to throw light on the aims and goals of political action from the standpoint of the teachings of the Bible and of the church. In the course of this instruction, church members should be encouraged to seek for themselves the answers to such questions as these: What are the social forces at work in a particular political campaign? What are the organized groups on one side, and what are the organized groups on the other side? What are the specific "interests" that these different groups have in the campaign? What does each one of them want to get out of the campaign, and what is each one of them trying to accomplish through the campaign? Which of these social forces is represented by one or another of the candidates? Are the avowed goals of the different candidates capable of being justified in Christian terms?

In addition, Christians should expect from their church help in locating sources of corruption and injustice in the community and in determining who is politically responsible for these conditions. The church, as such, is not usually in a position to obtain this information on its own account. But ministers and laymen can obtain through other qualified agencies or organizations factual data of this kind and use it to create a more enlightened public opinion. Further, the church should encourage its members to join and work with civic groups of all kinds dedicated to the cause of good government.

The Vocation of Politics

The future of the church, as well as the future of Western civilization, is very closely related to the type of political leadership America furnishes during the coming years. If the typical

American political success story is to be the story of the boy who has had little education, who has no awareness of the implications of Christian ethics for public life, but who possesses an animal-like cunning, and who knows how to use the big lie in its American setting, as Hitler used it in its German setting, then we can be sure that the Christian church, as well as Western civilization, will pass through a period of at least partial eclipse. The barbarians are coming out of their caves again and are taking over. The only way to meet the threat of this new barbarism is for the church to send its ablest and most dedicated sons and daughters into public life. In other words, the interests of the church itself, as well as the interests of civilization, demand that politics should become a Christian vocation.

The political arena is by and large unoccupied missionary territory. The church has as much responsibility for sending men and women with the spirit of missionaries into this territory as for sending them to Korea or to the Belgian Congo. The greatest need of our time is for an aroused sense of responsibility for public affairs throughout the entire Christian community. We must ask our sons and daughters to dedicate their lives to American politics in the same spirit as that which has led young people to volunteer to go to China or to the Mohammedan world as missionaries. God has ordained government for men. He is calling Christian men and women to be active in government. The vocation of politics is ideally a high calling. It is the responsibility of the church to make it so in fact.

—FRANCIS P. MILLER

A Commentary

Mr. Miller has been economical as to space and so has presented the Editor with an opportunity for extensive comment. We hope, by the way, that our readers have sensed the purpose of this section devoted to "pointing up" or to friendly critique. A formal list of discussion questions and reading references seems less suited to the requirements of most of our readers than a frank statement of opposing views, of supplementary considerations, or of factors that might be overlooked. However, this is a matter on which we shall welcome advice.

Our major article this month poses a nice question concerning "bias." We suspect that readers who do not know Francis P. Miller's background—if there are such—will conclude that he is a Democrat! Our own opinion is that since the appeal he makes is to general Christian sanctions a frank avowal of his political "slant" is all to the good. This is one of the several important considerations raised by the thought-provoking report of the Board of Review on the work of the Council for Social Action, a document whose implications for this magazine are receiving our respectful and studious attention. We shall welcome counsel on this score, also.

The Church-State Issue

Mr. Miller has stated in his own way the difference between a sound and a wholly fanciful interpretation of the separation of church and state, as it bears on his theme. This is the issue which the Supreme Court left in confusion in the famous McCollum decision but clarified in considerable measure in a later decision. The crucial point is that separation between the institutions of religion and those of government must not be taken as isolating religion from political affairs. The dictum in the McCollum case that "both religion and government can best work to achieve their lofty aims if each is left free from the other within its respective sphere," is one that the churches

could never approve, and the fact that the Court itself has now moved away from it has given much satisfaction.

The considerations governing political action by Christian groups which does no violence to the integrity of the church will be further explored in our February issue.

The "Independent" Voter

The most complicated aspect of our problem concerns "independent" voting. Mr. Miller points out, as other informed writers have done, that aloofness from party activities sharply limits the range of a person's political influence. But when one argues this way he is running counter to a tradition that is strong in Protestantism and in American secular thought also. *Life* said editorially at the beginning of the last presidential election campaign: "Over a quarter of the electorate now call themselves 'independents.' Like many affiliated Republicans and Democrats, these are by and large people of conscience and education who read the papers, ponder the issues, and otherwise take their franchise seriously. An electorate thus weighted by the informed and conscientious is worth more than a full turnout of people who don't give a damn."

About the same time David Lawrence wrote: "An independent is a person who does not feel allegiance to either party as such and who reserves the right, after reading or hearing all the campaign speeches, to decide for himself next November which candidate he will vote for. That's what this writer intends to do—he is not committed at this time to either party or to any candidate but hopes objectively to take a look at both nominees and to examine what they say and then make up his mind by election day."

Moreover, during the week when that was published Cabell Phillips, in an article entitled "As the Independent Voter Goes—" in the *New York Times Magazine*, had this to say concerning a study made by a member of the Elmo Roper organization: "Out of a mass of such scientific samplings he has

concluded that 17 per cent of all those who have voted over the period can be classified as independents; that is, they crossed party lines often enough in local as well as national elections to demonstrate that they have no binding party loyalties.

"Applying this yardstick to the 1948 vote, [he] concludes that of the 48,833,000 who went to the polls that year, 8,330,000 were independents."

Manifestly, this question of independent voting is not a simple one. The dilemma is expressed by Dr. Schattschneider in his book, *The Struggle for Party Government*, in these words: "In the folklore of politics the greatest virtue of public officials is 'independence.' Thus, independent candidates are [considered] better than party candidates. . . . We cling to this notion in spite of the demonstrable fact that the greater the number of independents the smaller will be the number of partisans able to control Congress, for independence is a synonym of ineffectiveness in a game in which teamwork produces results."

It would seem that the problem is how to make attractive and ethically compelling a laborious task for which most good people have neither preparation nor inclination.

The Two-Party System

Mr. Miller's enthusiasm for our American political system as compared with the multi-party system as we see it in France, for example, will doubtless be shared by most of our readers. Yet the implications of the two-party system offer serious difficulties. Mr. Walter Lippmann, who has written illuminatingly on the subject, has rejected the notion that a political party should be the embodiment of an ideology. Rather it should be a disciplined organization embracing a sufficient number of groups to win the right to govern. Its platform must be tailored for a strategic campaign, not designed to embody a political philosophy. Yet Mr. Lippmann wrote in the summer of 1952: "The Republican faction which supports Sen. Taft is dominated by men with a deep conviction that this is their last chance,

and the country's last chance, to arrest and to reverse a movement which is altering radically the American government and the American way of life."

These Republicans, Mr. Lippmann said, regarded the party of Roosevelt and Truman as "having carried out—as in fact they have—a revolutionary change in American domestic and foreign affairs. The Republicans of Taft's persuasion intend to carry out, if they can, a counter-revolution." Here is evidence that even under a two-party system the lines of political battle are sometimes ideologically drawn. Is not this bound to be the case in a critical period during which, as in the two decades following 1932, the two-party system approximates a one-party system? The eventuality which Mr. Miller contemplates with so much disfavor—the turning of our parties into ideological camps—has come very near realization if we may take seriously the pronouncements of the leaders in both of them. Indeed *Social Action* in the issue on "The Christian Faith and American Politics" (November, 1951) made much of the differences between our two major parties in terms of basic social philosophy.

It is just possible that we who believe in Christian social action have not yet correctly put together the pieces in the political puzzle. May it not be that our major parties are in very truth fluctuating aggregations of interest groups and pressure groups, but that *among these constituents are a varying proportion of persons for whom the party is a vehicle for directed social change?* Such a view of the matter might resolve the conflict between these divergent political theories.

In any case, the problem confronting Christians who seek a sound ethical basis for political action is one of finding *Christian* sanctions for participating in *secular* affairs in cooperation with persons who reject those sanctions but pursue, at least in part, the same objectives. The Christian, to be effective in politics, has to be, in some sense, a "collaborationist"—with various secular groups.

This is presumably what Mr. Miller has in mind when he calls for a working theory of "compromise." The word is, unfortunately, ambiguous, and its connotation of something reprehensible is difficult to shake off. This subject is one on which T. V. Smith discourses avidly and with much insight. Writing in the *American Political Science Review* (September, 1951) he said: "The free world is filled with organizations operating well below the ceiling of love but well above the floor of hate. . . . The national state is made up of groups so unlikeminded—often in religion, ever in economics, frequently in art—that each tends naturally to cancel others out. Political compromise becomes the cement of sociality which alone can—when it can—bridge the chasms created by diversity of power drives. The principle of business—that competition is also cooperation—becomes the enlarged principle of politics as well. Consent is achieved only through concession."

In this sense, compromise is the essence of politics, which is "the art of the possible." But to regard compromise as sub-moral—something to be "condoned," merely—is to prejudice politics quite hopelessly from the Christian point of view. It is a serious defect in the current theological realism that it denies high ethical sanction to a course of action which, while far from ideal, is the best that the situation permits. One who chooses the best among imperfect alternatives is entitled to the satisfaction of being right. "We have an absolute responsibility to do our relative best."

"Splinter Parties"

One may well be dismayed at the spectacle of multi-party politics in Europe, with its rapid succession of ineffectual governments, but it is a question whether, even in America, "third" parties can be said to be without historical importance. Norman Thomas relates that a "prominent Republican leader" stopped him on the street one day to remark: "You're conservative now. We right wing Republicans have to accept in our platform

planks that only you socialists were talking about in 1928 or '32." The Catholic weekly *Commonweal* once put the matter succinctly: "Third parties, because they usually offer causes with no hope of effects, have little chance of attracting sufficient support among Americans to lend them major stature. Their function in our national life is thus the negative role of protest and indirect influence on the major parties."

Mr. Miller himself has recognized this aspect of the subject in his admonition that "winning" is not the main thing. Certainly winning *today* is often an absurd expectation. "Historically," said a writer in the *New York Times Magazine*, "the importance of the minor parties must be measured more by their pioneering influence on American political thought than by their scores at the ballot box. The abolition of slavery, votes for women and free education are just a few examples of reforms originally advocated by minority groups and later adopted and put into effect by the major parties. With this in mind, the minor parties regard participation in a Presidential campaign primarily as a means of publicizing their ideas."

Elections Are Not the Whole of It

We must remember that political action is much more than casting ballots or participating in party activities. Former Senator William Benton once said: "Citizens vote by adding their names and energies to membership rolls. They vote by swelling, or failing to swell, the circulations of particular newspapers or periodicals. They vote by contributing to the popularity of particular radio or newspaper commentators. They vote by writing letters to the editor. They vote much more potently than they know when they write or talk to members of legislative bodies and to administrative officials. They vote as they express themselves in labor unions, farm organizations, business and professional bodies. They vote in every contribution they make to the climate of opinion in a thoroughly political society. They vote more effectively still as they organize to exert influence.

They vote effectively in proportion to the persistence of their efforts, for persistence is an index to intensity of feeling."

Let Us Face It

Do not most of us need to do some sober thinking about the implications of this entire discussion? Much of what Mr. Miller has written strikes home even though the reader may differ with him as to the particular political concerns that he discloses. For we don't take readily to political activity. We think it less than edifying, often compromising, perhaps even degrading; and beside all that, it takes too much time. What is more, we Protestants are disinclined to submit to the kind of party discipline that the business of government seems to require. Mr. Miller's challenge cannot be shrugged off, but we confidently expect plenty of reactions from our readers.

By the time our next issue (February) goes to press we should have some interesting correspondence to report.

—F. E. J.